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RUEHGT/AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA 0582
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 1982
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 3166
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 1855
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 4131
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 4569
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 9143
RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LA PAZ 002946

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR, MOD DISCUSS WAY FORWARD

Classified By: Ambassador Philip S. Goldberg for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador paid a courtesy call on Minister of Defense Walker San Miguel October 30, discussing a wide range of military issues. San Miguel told the Ambassador that the F-10 weapons have been moved to the army depository in La Paz, and that his ministry would coordinate with the Embassy regarding their security. Regarding the New Horizons humanitarian exercise planned for 2007, San Miguel said the Morales government would send the appropriate information to congress the week of November 6, thus preparing the way for the new Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). The Ambassador and San Miguel discussed possible future cooperation on counternarcotics, and agreed to leave the MANPADS transfer in the past. Ending with a joint press conference, the meeting represented a positive step forward for mil-mil relations. End summary.

F-10 equipment: back in town?

¶2. (C) The Ambassador paid a courtesy call on Minister of Defense Walker San Miguel October 30, discussing a range of military issues. The Ambassador opened the meeting by restating Washington's desire for an improvement in bilateral relations. San Miguel told the Ambassador that the Ambassador had "brought (a positive trend) with him," adding that the F-10 weapons have been moved to the army depository in La Paz and that his ministry would coordinate with the Embassy regarding their security. The minister complimented the USG for keeping the F-10 equipment issue private, stating that "if we continue in that manner we can overcome our problems." The Ambassador said that with that issue resolved, the GOB and the USG could move forward with other programs including IMET-funded education, training, and limited equipment upgrades.

New Horizons

¶3. (C) Regarding the New Horizons humanitarian exercise planned for 2007, San Miguel said the Morales government would consult with Bolivia's congress the week of November 6, thus preparing the way for a new SOFA. The Ambassador told San Miguel that approval of the SOFA is in the GOB's hands but offered U.S. assistance. The minister said the GOB would explain the exercise to congress and the Bolivian people, and that he did not anticipate any difficulties in getting the new agreement approved.

Counternarcotics cooperation

¶4. (C) On counternarcotics, San Miguel defended the GOB's "relative success," citing the high number of cocaine seizures in the past months. The Ambassador mentioned that he had just toured the Chapare and saw the GOB's counternarcotics cooperation first-hand. The Ambassador noted, however, that there is anecdotal evidence that the increased seizures may be due to increased coca cultivation. The Ambassador commended GOB interdiction efforts, but said he is worried about increased coca growth. The Ambassador said the USG cannot support industrialization and the search for new licit coca markets which go beyond the traditional use. He suggested that the GOB and the USG continue to talk about ways to improve eradication, which is of critical importance, since illegal drug trafficking is a problem for Bolivia, the region and the world. San Miguel responded that voluntary eradication in the Yungas will be the most

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important part of the GOB's counternarcotics strategy. He admitted that eradication is an "emotional issue" in Bolivia, and said that the GOB would "need your assistance to develop an integrated policy."

MANPADS: leave them in the past

¶5. (C) Finally, the Ambassador asked San Miguel for help in leaving the issue of the MANPADS transfer in the past. The Ambassador encouraged the GOB not to continue to feed the issue. San Miguel said "unfortunately" the formal charges against former President Rodriguez and others cannot be undone because the matter rests with the prosecutor's office. San Miguel lamented that the transfer had not been handled with transparency, and cited the case of Nicaragua as a success story, where MANPADS destruction was debated publicly before the government decided to transfer the missiles. He said in the Bolivian case, there were many questions regarding alleged payment to Rodriguez and regarding authorization for the transfer. San Miguel assured the Ambassador that the issue would not be political, but that Congress and the judicial branch would handle it appropriately. San Miguel spoke highly of Rodriguez, who he described as a "friend."

Comment

¶6. (C) Ending with a joint press conference, the meeting represented a positive step forward for mil-mil relations. Once the F-10 equipment returns to U.S. custody in the La Paz depository (hopefully before week's end), the way could be clear for increased military cooperation. While this meeting was positive in tone, it remains to be seen whether the F-10 weapons issue has indeed been addressed as the minister promised. Many challenges may be ahead in our bilateral military relationship, but this meeting represents a first step in addressing these obstacles. End comment.

